

The Elements of Situation Comedy

By AL. E. CHRISTIE



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*One of a Series of Lectures Especially
Prepared for Student-Members
of The Palmer Plan*



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AL. E. CHRISTIE

AL. E. CHRISTIE is universally recognized as the most prolific author, director and producer of one, two and five-reel comedies that the screen has ever known, having to his credit nearly a thousand productions.

After a number of years' experience as a director for Universal, Nestor and other producing organizations, Mr. Christie organized the Christie Film Company, producing comedies for independent release, and since that time has turned out a minimum of four one-reel subjects and one two-reel production every month. Recently Mr. Christie has entered the five-reel field, and his large studios in Los Angeles are busy day and night producing these three forms of laugh-makers.

In the following pages this experienced writer and director of situation-comedies has given to the student advice that if heeded and practically utilized will be of direct and definite value.

DEFINITIONS do not always define and fine diversities of opinion occasionally give rise to several different and varying definitions for a single thing. In spite of this, I know of no better means of getting immediately at the roots of a subject than the examination and analysis of the definition or definitions of the subject involved. Perhaps in the true sense of its meaning the compound word "situation-comedy" is tautological, for any presentable screen comedy must contain situations. The term has come into common use, however, in order to distinguish between the clean-cut, plausible quality of screen humor and what is known as "slapstick" comedy. With the details of this difference we shall deal presently. For the moment let us turn to the Standard Dictionary. There we find comedy defined as "Dramatic representation of lively or amusing incidents, droll characters, etc.; an entertaining drama; anything ludicrous or comical." In Webster's Unabridged Dictionary we find the following: "A drama of light and amusing rather than serious character, and typically having a happy ending; the phase of drama expressing the comic or depicting scenes of amusing or cheerful nature." Dryden wrote "Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature; farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical." The phraseology used in the Standard and Webster's differs, but the content is essentially the same.

2. Of the word "situation" the Standard Dictionary says: "A combination of circumstances; complications; crisis," while Webster's Unabridged says "Relative position or combination of circumstances; temporary state or relation of affairs at a moment of action, as in a dramatic scene." All of these elements have been dealt with separately in the Handbook, but I am setting them down here in order to emphasize a point that needs reiteration, and that is that *comedy is essentially drama*, regardless of

whether a screen comedy be of one, two or five-reel length. *It must have a dramatic structure builded and shaped just as carefully and skillfully as though it were a serious drama.* During a term extending over something more than a decade I have been intensively concerned with the direction and production of one, two and five-reel comedies. Many of the stories upon which these offerings were founded I have purchased from free-lance writers; some were written by staff writers, and some I have written myself. I have always been eager to consider and purchase, if possible, stories submitted from the outside, and the reason that I have at times been compelled to depend upon staff writers or to take time between productions to create stories myself has been that so large a percentage of the manuscripts sent to me have been hastily or carelessly evolved and that so many persons have seemed to feel that no special study or preparation is necessary to write screen comedy, even though they have fully realized that the creation of serious dramas requires hard work and detailed study.

3. The failure to understand that comedy is just another form of drama has been responsible for much of this. In analyzing even the wildest sort of "slapstick" comedy, you will invariably find at least a trace of fundamental drama. If you will recall a few of the more preposterous of such productions that you have witnessed you will immediately realize that each of them contains the dramatic triad in some degree. Perhaps the characters were dressed in misfit clothing such as no one ever wore. There may have been strange and wonderful mustaches and beards of fantastic shape and unheard-of growth. The facial makeup may have been grotesque, but *invariably there was a basis of conflict.* Two of the comedians were struggling against each other for the hand or attentions of a young lady; peradventure one in attempting to perform a polite service for the wife of the other blunderingly brought himself under suspicion, and the resultant enmity between the two men was productive of conflict of a highly ludicrous nature; mayhap a group of absurd crooks were in conflict with sev-

eral droll detectives over the theft of a string of obviously fake diamonds. In every case, in spite of the throwing of pies, the shooting of harmless bullets, the falling of men and women from windows of high buildings only to pick themselves up and run away unhurt—in spite of all these “monstrous and chimerical” happenings, there was in each case a basis of struggle and suspense and a foundation of dramatic structure.

4. Common though careless usage has given us many terms and phrases that are not directly applicable to what they are intended to express and that therefore need explanation. In studio parlance the term “situation-comedy” is applied to the one and two-reel subjects in which the characters are dressed as they would be in real life, and in which their actions are plausible and based upon human motives. The five-reel subjects of this description attain the dignity of the term “comedy-drama.” The situation-comedy is in reality a one or two-reel comedy-drama. Most of those that I have produced and those that have been done by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew, Mr. and Mrs. Carter DeHaven and others of like nature supply good examples of situation-comedies. While there may be a little exaggeration and a little stretching of plausibility, the situations and incidents must in a general way be of the sort that might happen in real life to real persons.

5. I would advise the student photoplaywright to first decide through self-analysis whether he or she is better fitted for the creation of screen drama or comedy. So that I may not seem to contradict myself after having already stated that comedy is essentially drama, I shall differentiate by stating that comedy is drama built singly and solely for laughing purposes. There are very few who are capable of doing successful work in serious drama and at the same time of creating really laughable and salable screen comedy. There are exceptions, but they are rare. There is a market for drama and a market for comedy, and the photoplaywright would do well to decide which sort of material he or she is most likely to successfully write,

and then devote every bit of mental energy to one line or the other.

6. I shall proceed then under the assumption that I am discussing the subject of situation-comedy with a single student who has decided to perfect his or her technique, just as I would like to personally go over the subject with every individual who is interested if I had the time to spare. By all means devote ample time to broad, comprehensive study of the Handbook and the Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia. Become thoroughly familiar with the whole subject of the photoplay. Bear in mind that it is a separate art. In the art of painting one may excel with miniatures, another with marines, and still another with still-life. Each of the arts has its several branches of technique, but each of the arts is based upon one common foundation. The painter before he may win fame or fortune in his chosen specialty must first know all there is to know of the fundamentals of painting.

7. So it is with the musician—one may win a world-wide reputation at the piano, another as a violinist, and others as players of the cornet, trombone or harp, but each of them must first be well grounded in the fundamentals of music. Do not allow yourself to believe that because you are dealing with lightness and laughter your work is any less serious than that of the individual who creates the most heart-stirring drama or tragedy. Study the fundamentals of construction as set forth in the Handbook and the Encyclopedia, and study the screen. Let your screen study be inclusive of all sorts of features, both comedy and drama. Then when you feel that you have a substantial grasp of the subject, turn your attention to comedy.

8. When you have made this decision, pause and realize that very little of comedy is spontaneous. It must be carefully builded and manipulated just the same as any other form of story. Some of the most successful comedy writers that I know of have the appearance of undertakers or credit-men, rather than wholesale purveyors of laughter.

9. Do not mistake my meaning, however. Essentially

there must be a well-developed sense of humor if you expect to succeed as a creator of comedy, but that sense of humor must be firmly harnessed with, although never harassed by, the rules and regulations of the technique of construction. If you have not a sense of humor you cannot write comedy, but you may have the most well-developed sense of humor in the world and still you cannot write comedy if you do not permit yourself to be guided by the rules of photoplay plot construction.

10. Let you and me review the chapters of the Handbook and apply them to comedy construction. First we have action. If you have read and studied the Handbook you will probably say: "Why discuss action—I know that it is the basis of all screen stories and that is enough." All right, let me continue just the same. I know that the writer of comedy is more inclined to ignore this necessity than is the average student of serious drama. The comedy of the speaking stage and the humorous story written for printed publication depend to a very large extent upon dialogue, repartee and smart sayings, or upon the ability of the author to indulge in brilliant description. Mark Twain, Irvin Cobb and other authors of humorous literature may cause you to roll and squirm with mirth merely through their ability to manipulate words and phrases. You as a photoplaywright might possess that same ability, but neither you, Irvin Cobb nor any other humorist will ever meet with success as a writer of *screen comedy* by indulging in any such tactics. I have received, read and rejected manuscripts from famous writers of printed humor, and in many of these manuscripts I have found only enough action to supply material for a very small portion of a single reel of film. In many cases I have tilted back in my chair and laughed heartily at the story as expressed in words, and then after analyzing it for action I have been compelled to reject it with a letter explaining its screen deficiencies, or, when exceedingly busy with my multitudinous duties, with nothing more than a rejection slip. Therefore, I say do not overlook the fact that comedy must

be expressed in continuous and consecutive action if it is to be acceptable as a screen production.

11. Next we come to the element of characterization. It is not as necessary to develop each character to its fullest extent and with all the subtleties that are necessary in the creation of serious screen drama. Nevertheless the characters must be consistent to as great an extent as possible. You have as a unit of the Palmer Plan a copy of "SPEED AND SUSPICION." Here is practically no characterization at all so far as the finer points are concerned. In a one-reel subject it is almost impossible to develop details of personal inclinations and habits, yet even in a subject of this sort it is possible to analyze each character and keep each character within certain bounds.

12. Take the motorcycle officer for instance. He is persistently intent upon just one thing—the sincere execution of his duty. At every point he is suspicious—he wants to be shown—he believes nothing until he sees it. After he has gone upstairs and witnessed what he believes to be Mrs. Syx in bed and exceedingly ill, he insists upon going up again and obtaining her signature in order that he may make a complete report. He has just one thing in his mind and that is the pursuance of his duty. Mr. Syx is obsessed by just one thought and that is to escape from a jail sentence. He goes to any extreme to effect this escape.

Mr. Ryde is a friend in need and a friend indeed. He is willing to do anything to assist his old pal, even when the whole situation looks hopeless, and he starts to make his escape. He meets his sweetheart and immediately presses her into service to assist his friend in releasing him from his extreme predicament. Mrs. Syx from the moment she meets the officer until the finish of the story is a suspicious and jealous wife. In comedy as in drama we must constantly realize that, while at times it is possible to enter into the intricacies of a characterization, it is safer and more desirable to deal with the predominating characteristics of each of the men and women involved in the story. One may be a jealous person, one may be filled with the

sense of duty, another may be stingy, another may be a spendthrift—we may deal with characters bent upon revenge, philanthropy, patriotism, etc., etc., but let each one be guided by his or her *predominating characteristics*.

14. Occasionally, of course, we may deal with a revulsion of characterization. Some of the funniest scenes that have ever been produced in screen comedy have dealt with a downtrodden person who has suddenly started to assert himself. It is the turning of the worm. Charlie Chaplin has frequently been seen as a little fellow dominated and abused by a great hulk of a man. He has borne the domination and permitted the abuse until he has reached the breaking point, and then suddenly collected all his latent courage and fought like a lion, defeating all opponents and overcoming all obstacles, yet up to that breaking point he has been consistently the downtrodden worm. Such revulsion and in other cases regeneration may come at a crisis and toward the end of the story, but up to such a point the characterization as established at the opening of the story should be consistent.

15. If you will stop and think for a moment, you will realize that you judge your friends and acquaintances by a predominating characteristic in each case. You speak of a man as being exceedingly stingy and you laugh at him for this reason. You ridicule him to his face or behind his back because he is a stingy man. He may be a fine citizen, he may be saving, a good father and husband, and really a mighty fine fellow, but the outstanding inclination toward stinginess demands first attention. For comedy purposes, at least, he is first, last and all the time a stingy man. In comedy we are seeking no particular moral except through satire, with which we shall later concern ourselves, therefore all we want to know of a man or woman is the outstanding and attention-forcing characteristic. You may even go a bit to extreme. In drama a hero is a hero, a villain a villain, a heroine a heroine, and so on, yet those characterizations may be modified in order to make the drama human, but in comedy the villain may always be a

villain, the hero always a hero, and the heroine always a heroine.

16. Next in the order of the chapters in the Handbook we come to situation. That is the pivot upon which all of our endeavors in the situation-comedy revolve, or, perhaps I should say, that is the track upon which the train of situation-comedy should move forward. We must have one situation following another, and they must be closely related at all times. Succeeding situations must come about naturally and in a logical manner as the result of the preceding situation. Let us turn again to "SPEED AND SUSPICION." This is an exceedingly light comedy and presented as a unit of the Palmer Plan only to emphasize the unities of time, place and action, yet we may pick the situations decisively in this one-reel offering. Not the incidents, interesting as they may be, mind you, but the situations. First, after the motorcycle chase, Mr. Syx is caught between the prospect of a jail sentence and whatever possibility of escape he may invent. For the moment he squirms out of this. He was in a situation—a temporary crisis—a predicament—and for the moment he escaped. Out of this situation or predicament he logically runs into another one when it becomes necessary for him to produce his wife's signature for the benefit of the suspicious officer.

17. The next genuine situation occurs when the suspicious Mrs. Syx, who has returned from her vacation unexpectedly, and who has met the officer outside the door, demands to know the cause of the noise upstairs. When her suspicions are quieted the succeeding situation occurs when she sees the girl leaving the house and starts to chase. The return of the officer supplies the final situation which leads to the end of the story.

18. It must be understood that this is a one-reel comedy and no more situations than those contained in this story can usually be crowded into one thousand feet of film.

19. In writing a drama we interest the audience in our hero or heroine and then, in placing obstacles in their

paths and bringing them into difficult and dangerous situations, we win the audience's sympathy for them. The spectators sit breathless with suspense and frequently with tears in their eyes as they sympathize with and hope for the "good" characters and abhor the "bad" ones. They are earnestly interested in the lives of these fictitious people and they take the events of the story seriously. In a comedy this is reversed. The characters in a screen comedy may get into all sorts of trying and thrilling predicaments, yet the audience laughs heartily at all the discomfiture and pain that the characters suffer. As Mr. Palmer has explained in the Handbook, practically every comedy is founded upon the misfortunes of a character or group of characters. At the end, however, audiences like to see everything satisfactorily explained, the tangle straightened out and a "happy ending."

20. In a two-reel comedy there must be a stronger sequence of situations and much more body to the plot than in a one-reel subject. It is equally obvious that a five-reel comedy-drama must contain the same general amount of material that a five-reel serious drama would, with the difference that the author seeks to make the audience laugh rather than sympathize and weep. In any comedy the sequence of situations must be connected and co-related quite as carefully as in a serious drama. Many stories are submitted to studios by untrained writers—stories containing sequences of incidents and possibly some really good situations that are very laughable in themselves, but that are so unrelated and disconnected that they do not make a real plot or story. Such manuscripts of course have to be rejected. It is regrettable that a writer who is capable of inventing a number of funny incidents and situations should not take the time to learn how to skillfully connect them and build them into a well-rounded plot, for this is the only sort of material that will sell.

21. Next in the Handbook we come to "theme." In dealing with comedy, theme is not of the vital importance that it is in serious drama, yet practically every comedy

may to a certain extent be analyzed for theme. The theme of a story may be summed up in a single word, such as "revenge," "suspicion," "jealousy," or in a brief phrase such as "foolish ambition," "false pride," "misplaced confidence," or something of the sort. Little attention need be paid to theme in comedy.

22. The sixth chapter deals with "material." Mr. Palmer has spoken of the unending supply of dramatic material, and I assure you that the world is just full of happenings that may be utilized in comedy if properly handled. If there is a drama in every house and around every corner, there is by all means a laugh to be found in every minute of life. The comedy is a definite sense, inborn and innate, and the writer must possess this sense to begin with. Then he must search for material. Such material will be found in fragments and must be manipulated and given careful and skillful treatment in order to work it into definite plot form and render it tempting to a scenario buyer and interesting to an audience. You may hit upon a strong single situation, and one that is intensely funny, but this is by no means sufficient, nor is it a complete story in itself.

23. Here is a situation that has been used several times with different treatment and variations. Two men, both of them swindlers of the Wallingford type, are being pursued by officers of the law and it is very necessary that they keep separated and permit no one to see them together. In addition to this fact, they have fallen out and are bitterest personal enemies, each having threatened the other. One of them goes to a hotel carrying a suitcase containing his pajamas and toilet articles; registers, rents a room and is taken up to it by a bell boy who immediately goes back down to the hotel office. This man, whom we may call Mr. Black for convenience, goes into the room, and passes through to the private bath where he deposits his suitcase. He immediately leaves the room, locks the door, goes down to the hotel desk and throws his key carelessly on the counter, passing on out into the street to trans-

act some business elsewhere. Within a short time his former associate and present enemy, Mr. White, comes to the same hotel and registers.

24. The clerk takes down another key from the rack, lays it on the counter within a few inches from the one left by Mr. Black and summons a bell boy. The bell boy picks up Mr. Black's key instead of the one that has been assigned to Mr. White and shows Mr. White up to the same room that has been rented to Mr. Black. Mr. White has just reached the city from a long journey and prepares for some immediate rest. There is a screen standing a few feet from the open window, and Mr. White after undressing lays his clothes over the top of the screen and immediately goes to bed and to sleep. Several hours later Mr. Black returns and being preoccupied with many worries absent-mindedly passes the desk and goes straight to his room without asking for his key. Mr. White has left the key in the door and Black enters without giving the incident any thought whatever.

25. Mr. Black goes immediately into the bathroom without noticing Mr. White in bed or Mr. White's clothes hanging over the top of the screen. In the bathroom Mr. Black undresses, puts on his pajamas, comes back into the room, rings for a bell boy, who immediately comes up to the door. Mr. Black hands him his suit, telling him to take it out to a tailor to be pressed. When the bell boy has departed Mr. Black locks the door and starts toward the bed and prepares to retire. As he does so he stumbles against the screen, which tips towards the window, and Mr. White's clothes fall from the top of the screen and out the window, where they land in a passing automobile truck and are carried away.

26. As Mr. Black turns toward the bed, Mr. White awakens. Here we have the situation. Here are two men who for their own good ought positively not be found together and who are at the same time bitter enemies and prepared to fight at a moment's notice. Each has a single suit of clothes with him, but one suit has been whisked

away in an automobile and the other has been sent out to be pressed. Upon this situation a story may be built, but first we must go back and supply the details of the former relations between Black and White, and work the story from a given start up to the present moment. Then we must continue from this situation and build on up to a climax and satisfactory ending.

27. The same situation might deal with a man and wife who have been separated and who having closed up their home have each decided to go to a hotel and make arrangements for a divorce. It might be the wife's clothes that fall out the window and the man's suit that is sent out to be pressed, and the situation might lead to a reconciliation and a happy ending.

28. The same situation might be varied to deal with two women. There are numerous ways in which a story might be built into a very funny comedy by going back and building from the start up to this situation and from here on to a conclusion. I have given this example merely to illustrate how necessary it is to devote much careful thought and skillful treatment to adding new, although carefully related, situations when one has been found that serves as a story germ. These related situations must be filled in with incidents and the whole structure must be coordinated and given motive and plausibility throughout.

29. If we were dealing with this situation as the foundation of a drama, we might make it exceedingly serious and even tragic. In handling it for comedy purposes we may work the suspense up to a certain point and then bring it to a ludicrous termination, working immediately into another and, if possible, funnier situation. In serious drama it is desirable to make each succeeding situation more dramatic and filled with more suspense than the preceding one. In comedy we endeavor to make each succeeding situation funnier and funnier as the story progresses. If situations in a comedy are carefully built we will automatically have suspense, just the same as in drama. In the temporary crisis that I have just mentioned the au-

dience is in suspense from the moment they realize that Mr. Black and Mr. White have engaged the same room. It knows that they are going to meet eventually and the nearer that Black and White get together the greater becomes the suspense, which reaches its height when White awakens and sees Black standing by the bedside in his pajamas. Perhaps a fight starts immediately. Perhaps, on the other hand, the two men are too shrewd to start any disturbance, but just after recognizing each other there may come a knock at the door and the officers that are pursuing them may demand entrance. This would naturally bring about the necessity of Black and White stepping out of the window and creeping around to a nearby fire escape in order to flee. At once we have the laugh-provoking sight of two men in pajamas being pursued by officers of the law. These are merely rambling suggestions given in order to show how a story may be kept fluid and be turned over and over in the mind of the comedy writer before definite treatment is decided upon.

30. Do not under any circumstances allow yourself to decide upon incidents, situations or the sequence of situations until you have looked the matter over from every possible angle. Even though you have what seems to be a funny sequence, lay it aside for a day or so and review the story from start to finish, trying to find ways and means of making it funnier.

31. The element of unity is as necessary in comedy as in drama, and I believe it to be more so. A screen comedy must move faster than the average drama and to interrupt it with lapses of time or changes of locality interrupts the accelerating movement. It is not always possible to avoid lapses of time, nor is it always easy to hold a story to a single locality, but it is exceedingly desirable to do both of these things as consistently as you can.

32. Now as to motive—you will find that you may test a comedy effectively and accurately in the same way that a drama may be summed up and tested for motive. In the Encyclopedia we have the analysis of "THE

GOLDEN CHANCE.” Analyze your comedies in the same way. Simple and light as “SPEED AND SUSPICION” is, the following analysis will illustrate how the sequence of motive may be determined.

(A) Because Mrs. Syx is away on a vacation Mr. Syx takes a day off and starts on a joy ride with a friend of his bachelor days.

(B) Because timid Mr. Ryde objects to the speed that they are making, Mr. Syx “steps on it” all the more and is pursued by a motorcycle policeman.

(C) Because Mr. Syx has been arrested several times before and has been warned by the Judge that the next offense will mean a jail sentence, he is naturally frantic to escape.

(D) Because of this frantic fear Mr. Syx glibly lies about his wife being sick and Ryde being a doctor.

(E) Because the motorcycle policeman knows that Mr. Syx has been a persistent breaker of the speed laws and that he has strict orders to arrest him whenever he is caught committing such an offense, and although he is inclined to believe the story of the sick wife, he decides to be absolutely sure in the matter.

(F) Because of the officer’s persistence, Mr. Syx has to think quickly and on the spur of the moment whispers to Mr. Ryde to disguise as the sick wife.

(G) Because Mr. Ryde realizes the seriousness of the situation and the necessity of carefully playing the part of a doctor, he takes the leather tool kit with him to look like a medicine case.

(H) Because Mr. Ryde desires to impress the officer with information that will forestall any closer investigation he whispers “It’s a boy.”

(I) Because the officer recalls the necessity of obtaining Mrs. Syx’s signature in order to make a complete report of the case, Mr. Ryde, who has discarded his disguise and followed the other two men downstairs, realizes

that he must act quickly if he is to successfully continue playing the parts of both the sick wife and the doctor.

(J) Because of his sudden panic when he faces this emergency, he runs out of the house intending to leave Mr. Syx to his fate.

(K) Because he abruptly runs into his sweetheart who is passing, he reconsiders and hastily leads her into the house so that she may impersonate the sick wife and save the situation.

(L) Because Mr. Syx has not had time to know of the substitution, he is in despair until he sees the girl in bed and realizes that all is well temporarily.

(M) Because Mrs. Syx returns unexpectedly from her vacation she meets the officer as he is leaving the house.

(N) Because she is naturally inquisitive concerning his presence, he informs her that a baby has just been born and her suspicions are naturally aroused.

(O) Because the girl upstairs accidentally tips over a chair, Mrs. Syx is still more suspicious and refuses to believe the explanation that there may be burglars in the house.

(P) Because of her jealous suspicions Mrs. Syx insists upon accompanying her husband and Mr. Ryde upstairs to investigate.

(Q) Because the girl has presence of mind to hide behind the dresser Mrs. Syx finds nothing to confirm her suspicions.

(R) Because Mrs. Syx sees the girl leaving the house she realizes that her suspicions are justified and starts in frantic pursuit.

(S) Because the two men desire to explain and avoid further trouble, they in turn start after the two fleeing women.

(T) Because the officer has been ordered to return to the house from headquarters and make the arrest in spite

of what he had regarded as a satisfactory excuse for speeding, he arrives just as explanations are being made, and leads Mr. Syx and Mr. Ryde away under arrest.

(U) If the comedy writer will test each detailed synopsis with this "because" system, I am sure that his or her manuscript will be much more acceptable.

33. So far as demand is concerned, audiences will always insist upon comedy photoplays as a part of every program. It follows that we must have a constant new supply of material and hence an ever-increasing group of new comedy writers. Some studios have announced that no manuscripts submitted from the outside will be considered. This has been the result of receiving vast numbers of manuscripts containing nothing of real value. Had the authors of these many unacceptable manuscripts studied the technique of construction and put the knowledge gained thereby into well-considered practice, the use of the rejection slip would not have been nearly as frequent. Most comedy producers are eagerly reading everything that is submitted and purchasing manuscripts just as often as they find anything that may be produced upon the screen. Provided that the student is inclined for comedy and feels that he or she possesses a real sense of humor, I urge that careful study and preparation be devoted to the subject, for without story material the producer is helpless. There is no doubt but that there is room for a great number of new writers who are capable of evolving comedies that are properly constructed and clearly set forth in detailed synopsis.

34. In comedy, as in drama, we must have craftsmanship. In comedy such craftsmanship must be based upon a sense of humor, but of the two, craftsmanship is the more important. The comedy writer is quite as useful as the screen dramatist. No one need look down upon comedy, nor the writing of comedy. Some of the most useful lessons may be taught through satire. Human nature with its imperfections, idiosyncracies and lamentable faults may be held up to the mirror and satirized in a one, two or five-

reel comedy with exceedingly beneficial results. Some of the most rollicking and mirth-provoking screen productions send the audience away with lessons that have been subconsciously absorbed, but that are lasting and productive of much real good. I remember standing in the lobby of a theater just as the matinee crowd was coming out one afternoon. The program had closed with a short comedy depicting a man who was too busy with his own affairs to think about his wife, who had repeatedly reminded him that she needed a new hat. The production was one laugh after another with scarcely a serious moment in it, but as the crowd filed out I saw a man grasp his wife's arm determinedly and I heard him say: "Come on, Mary—I'm going to buy you a hat." Undoubtedly he had found his own nature and his own quality of selfishness reflected in the characterization on the screen, and apparently the results were pleasing to his patient wife. The man had laughed uproariously during the action of the comedy, but he had done a little serious thinking between laughs and it had done him good.

35. Summing up briefly the work of writing "situation-comedies," please retain the thought that you must have a sequence of situations all carefully related, and one growing naturally and logically out of another until the final climax is reached. Write about real people and have as much real motive behind their actions as possible. You may deal with unusual happenings and there may be a certain amount of coincidence and a little departure from probability occasionally, but in the main attempt to be as plausible and logical as possible, always working for a laugh or a smile, for it is of such that screen comedies are made.

W. E. Christie,

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